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**Bachelor's thesis**

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Liberalization as the Trigger for Transition: President Khatami's  
Unsuccessful Attempt to Reform Iran

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	4
<b>1. The stages of transition</b>	5
1.1. First stage: liberalization	5
1.2. Second stage: the popular upsurge	6
1.2.1. The four political actors	8
1.3. Third stage: regime breakdown and transition of power	9
<b>2. The necessary conditions for a transition</b>	11
2.1. First condition: soft-line leaders in the military	11
2.2. Second condition: politically organized opposition	12
2.3. Third condition: moderates dominating the opposition	13
<b>3. Iran from 1997 to 2005: the stages of an abortive liberalization</b>	13
3.1. First stage: liberalization	14
3.1.1. Crises threatening the regime	14
3.1.2. Two strategies to address the crises	14
3.1.3. Hard-liners and soft-liners	16
3.2. Second stage: popular upsurge	17
3.2.1. The four political actors	19
3.3. The stand-off	21
3.4. The consequences of Khatami's unsuccessful liberalization	24
<b>4. The necessary conditions for a transition and the case of Iran</b>	25
4.1. First condition: soft-line leaders in the military	26
4.2. Second condition: politically organized opposition	27
4.3. Third condition: moderates dominating the opposition	28
<b>Conclusion</b>	30
<b>References</b>	32
<b>Kokkuvõte</b>	36

## **Introduction**

Like most countries in the Middle East, the Islamic Republic of Iran is an undemocratic country. The most powerful person in the government, the supreme leader, is not elected by popular vote and holds the office for life, while those opposing the concept of clerical rule are repressed.

During the presidency of Mohammad Khatami from 1997 to 2005 Iran underwent liberalization. In the hopes of reforming the system, opposition was allowed to debate about the regime and its alternatives. Many expressed hope that Iran would democratize, but in the end Khatami was unable to reform the system and liberalization policies were rolled back by the early 2000s. Yet the aftereffects of this era continue to influence Iran's politics to this day, as the demands of the oppositional Green Movement echo those voiced during the Khatami era, and as the authoritarian regime pays considerably more attention to the economy than in the early years following the Islamic Revolution.

Very few articles covering this period of liberalization tie the case of Iran with general liberalization and / or transition theories. Most articles put the setbacks of Khatami's reform program down to reasons particular to Iran's political system or the president's personality. His failure has been explained with the inconsistencies in his ideology (Masroori 2007), his temperance (Takeyh 2009:185), his unwillingness to publicly side with the opposition (Gheissari and Nasr 2006:140), and the extensive powers of the supreme leader (Kamrava and Hassan-Yari 2004).

This thesis argues that the causes for Khatami's reform program's failure are structural and not unique to Iran. To this end, the transition theory of Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, with additional comments from Adam Przeworski and Graeme Gill, is used as a theoretical framework for the case study of Iran under president Khatami from 1997 to 2005.

O'Donnell and Schmitter's theory brings out the most important political actors, the dynamics of the actors' relationship and the necessary conditions for a transition. This framework enables analysis of Khatami's lack of success in reforming the system in terms of institutional structure and political organization.

The theoretical framework is divided into two parts. The first chapter covers the

stages of transition, explaining the connection between liberalization and democratization. The second chapter focuses on the conditions of a transition by bringing out three conditions that should be present to prevent an abortive liberalization, meaning a situation where the rights and guarantees are once again taken away by the regime. Chapters three and four apply this framework to the empirical case of Iran, first by structuring the Khatami era into three stages, and then by checking whether the three necessary conditions for a transition were met.

## 1. The stages of transition

This chapter explains how under favorable conditions, liberalization can set off a chain of events that eventually lead to transition of power. This process can be divided into three stages. First, most peaceful transitions are set off by liberalization policies initiated by the authoritarian regime itself. This is followed by mobilization of the masses against the regime (labeled here as the “popular upsurge”), which in turn might provide the momentum for the actual transition, often by convincing the authoritarian regime and the opposition that negotiating with each other is the best option. A successful transition of power allows democratization to begin.

### 1.1. First stage: liberalization

The main premise of O'Donnell and Schmitter's theory is that transitions begin with fissures inside the regime. Among those who rule an authoritarian country, there have to be some people who think the regime is losing legitimacy and should broaden its base of support. These **soft-liners** believe that in order to maintain power, the regime has to liberalize (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:16).

**Liberalization** can be defined as a process which makes “effective certain rights that protect both individuals and social groups from arbitrary or illegal acts committed by the state or third parties.” These rights may include *habeas corpus*, freedom of speech, sanctity of private home and correspondence, freedom to associate voluntarily with other citizens, relaxation of media censorship etc. (Ibid.:7). Liberalization may initially remain informal, when the regime signals greater tolerance for certain

activities, even if no new legislation concerning these rights and guarantees is passed (Gill 2000:47).

However, there are always members of the regime who think that either the authoritarian regime is not facing a crisis serious enough to merit reforms or that power can be maintained through increased coercion over the population. These are **hard-liners** who oppose liberalization (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:16).

Usually liberalization is initiated when the regime is going through a crisis (Ibid.:17). The crisis (or crises) undermining the regime may, but does not have to be, an economic downturn (Przeworski 1988:97). Nevertheless, whatever problems the regime is facing, they are usually caused by domestic factors, and international pressure is a secondary factor (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:18).

The distinction between hard-liners and soft-liners is mainly based on their preferred strategies for maintaining power, and crises bring out the fault-lines inside the regime most clearly. O'Donnell and Schmitter's theory presumes that political actors are rational and make decisions based on cost and benefit analysis (Przeworski 1988:53-54; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:74). Soft-liners do not initiate liberalization with the intention to bring about the collapse of the regime and establish a democracy. On the contrary, soft-liners believe they can control the liberalization process and revive the regime by gaining greater legitimacy among the population (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:24).

As the terms "hard-line" and "soft-line" denote strategic postures (Przeworski 1988:53, 55), concrete people and groups may change their strategy. There will always be pragmatists, who can ally with either side, depending on whose tactic they consider more viable. In the first stage of transition, soft-liners have the upper hand compared to hard-liners. If hard-liners cannot offer any solutions besides continued repression of dissent, then soft-liners can convince the pragmatic members of the regime to support their liberalization policies. These pragmatists use a "wait and see" tactic to see if the soft-liners' approach succeeds (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:26-27).

## **1.2. Second stage: the popular upsurge**

Liberalization, even in the form of a minor extension of rights and guarantees,

tends to bring about mass mobilization among the population (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:48). At first, when the regime announces toleration of some collective action and contestation of issues which were previously not allowed, only a few individuals dare to test these new limits. If they are not punished by the regime, other people follow their example. This grows into what O'Donnell and Schmitter (1991:48-54) call the “popular upsurge” or the “resurrection of the civil society,” as more and more people become politicized, discuss the crimes of and alternatives to the current authoritarian regime, and discover common ideals through these debates.

At this point liberalization escapes regime's control and moves into the second, popular upsurge stage. According to Przeworski liberalization is inherently unstable, because contrary to the intentions of soft-liners, it undermines the legitimacy of the regime by making the discussion of alternatives possible (1995:58-59). Artists, intellectuals, universities, literary and academic journals, professional associations, labor unions, human rights organizations and the like all become energized to demand more concessions from the regime (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:49-53).

These diverse oppositional forces that spring up can also be divided into two strategic postures – moderates and radicals. **Moderates** are people and groups in the opposition willing to work with the soft-liners, hoping that if they give soft-liners some guarantees and concessions, the authoritarian regime will step down peacefully (Przeworski 1995:67-68). In turn, **radicals** tend to believe that the regime is so morally corrupt and the opposition so strong that no negotiations with the authoritarian rulers are needed (Ibid.:68-69).

On the grounds of this distinction, it can be assumed that moderates use the channels provided by the liberalization policies to voice their demands for more concessions, whereas radicals prefer to go outside these channels by holding mass protests and strikes to push the authoritarian regime from power.

Even though liberalization usually does not go according to soft-liners' expectations, they might be willing consider working with moderates to negotiate a transition to democracy. This is often because soft-liners either have a reason to believe they are popular enough to win even in democratically held elections, or on the contrary, because they realize that since they are going to lose power inevitably, they might as well step down in a way that allows them to portray themselves as heroes who helped to

lead the country toward a better future (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:25). Whatever their future calculations, being risk-averse, soft-liners realize that a full-scale repression will widen the gap between the regime and the general population even more, while leaving the problems which convinced them to liberalize in the first place unsolved. They consider co-operating with the opposition to be potentially more productive than stubbornly trying to hold the authoritarian regime together at any cost.

In turn, in this stage hard-liners are even more reluctant to give away power than before. Now that the masses are actively demanding the regime to fall, hard-liners' worst fears have come true and they see an urgent need for wide-scale intervention to stop the process from escalating further (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:26-27). Their argument goes like this: soft-liners went against their wishes and relaxed control over the society, and just like hard-liners predicted, this weakened the regime even more. In the view of the hard-liners, liberalization policies need to be rolled back and dissent must be repressed as soon as possible. They realize that the longer liberalization continues, the harder it will be to suppress the upsurge (Ibid.:53).

Popular upsurge and splits within the regime reinforce each other (Przeworski 1995:57). As the opposition starts mobilizing, soft- and hard-liners continue to grow further apart in terms of the strategies they prefer. Even if the liberalization was very limited in the beginning, people will start demanding more guarantees and rights (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:10), while visible disunity inside the regime signals the society that the authoritarian system is weakening.

In the second stage, many pragmatists who initially at least implicitly supported the soft-liners may change their position and ally with the hard-liners. Compared to the first stage, the arguments of soft-liners have been refuted and hard-liners have an easier time in finding allies inside the regime (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:26-27).

### 1.2.1 The four political actors

Below, table 1 describes the strategic postures of the four political actors in the end of the second, popular upsurge stage. These dispositions set the stage for the next developments, whether it is a violent stand-off or a peaceful transition.

Soft-liners and moderates are risk averse and prefer to avoid violence, while hard-liners and radicals are more willing to use violence.



<b>Soft-liners</b> Regime insiders. Willing to co-operate with the opposition to avoid violence and maintain power or get concessions for stepping down.	<b>Hard-liners</b> Maximalists inside the regime. Believe repression is possible even after popular mobilization. May see their rule in terms of a mission and democracy as chaotic and dangerous, which makes them unwilling to co-operate with the opposition.
<b>Moderates</b> In the opposition. Willing to negotiate and give some concessions to the regime in order to keep the transition peaceful. Adapt cautious tactics, as they fear the hard-liners' violent reaction more than radicals do.	<b>Radicals</b> Maximalists in the opposition. Unwilling to negotiate with the regime, prepared to use force to push authoritarian rulers from power.

*Graph 1: the main characteristics of each political actor; based on O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991, and Przeworski 1995.*

The popular upsurge is the critical stage of the transition. Here, soft-liners have to be able to hold the hard-liners back from repressing the mobilized masses. Moderates need to make sure that radicals do not become so violent and dominant to make soft-liners doubt the possibility of negotiations and concessions (Przeworski 1995:69). If hard-liners triumph, opposition will be violently suppressed and liberalization policies will be rolled back. In worst case scenario, if hard-liners and radicals both prevail over their more moderate counterparts, the stand-off can escalate to a civil war. However, if the soft-liners and moderates succeed in holding them back, the process can move on to the third, transition stage.

### **1.3. Third stage: regime breakdown and transition of power**

In the third stage, the old authoritarian regime breaks down and is replaced by a new system of institutions. There are three general scenarios when liberalization

initiated from inside the regime results in a transition of power (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:39):

- (a) The opposition is so strong and authoritarian regime so discredited that the regime is forced to step down;
- (b) Soft-liners inside the regime are strong and confident enough to control the transition to democracy on their own terms. The institutional structure changes, but some members of the old regime maintain power;
- (c) Soft-liners and moderates negotiate a peaceful transfer of power.

This thesis follows O'Donnell and Schmitter by focusing on the last situation, which is a transition through extrication. Here, soft-liners and moderates negotiate a compromise, i.e., a pact (either formal or informal) where they “forgo or underutilize their capacity to harm each other by extending guarantees not to threaten each others' corporate autonomies or vital interests,” (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:38). Pacts may, for example, entail guarantees against prosecution for the actions undertaken during authoritarian rule so the old regime feels confident enough to step down (Gill 2000:56).

As O'Donnell and Schmitter (1991:72) conclude, political democracy “emerges from the interdependence of conflicting interests and the diversity of discordant ideals, in a context which encourages strategic interaction among wary and weary actors.” Successful negotiations conclude with an agreement when important actors feel that they have either a chance to compete for power and economic welfare within the new (democratic) institutions or that the agreement provides them concessions that protect them from the retaliation for the acts committed under the old authoritarian regime (Przeworski 1995:30,68).

Not every transition results in a democracy. However, a transition set off by liberalization and followed by popular upsurge is a relatively good starting point for democratization. From the three scenarios, a pacted transition is possible only when neither party feels strong enough to dictate the terms of the transition – when soft-liners believe the costs of crackdown are too high; and moderates understand that if they do not make some compromises soft-liners might ally with the hard-liners and roll back liberalization policies (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:38-39).

Actors taking part in negotiations know that they cannot eliminate any actor, and

thus they are compelled to compete for power. Together, soft-liners and moderates have a chance in holding back hard-liners and radicals, especially as the latter's ranks are thinning out due to the fatigue popular mobilization is bound to bring (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:56). As the negotiations are already taking place, many initial maximalists may also adopt a “wait and see” approach.

## **2. The necessary conditions for a transition**

There is no guarantee that the transition will result in a democracy. O'Donnell and Schmitter's theory provides a model of how liberalization might evolve into a peaceful transition. However, it is a schematic theoretical model and there are many moments from liberalization to negotiations where the process could stop or follow another trajectory.

As their transition theory focuses and is based on success stories of South Europe, Latin America and Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, O'Donnell and Schmitter pay relatively little attention to the causes of abortive liberalizations. However, in regard to the empirical case of Iran that will be discussed later, three conditions can be deduced from their theory that need to be met in order to peacefully move from the popular upsurge stage on to the transition stage. These are (1) the presence of soft-line leaders in the military, (2) politically organized opposition and (3) moderates dominating the opposition.

### **2.1. First condition: soft-line leaders in the military**

In order to move into the negotiations stage, soft-liners need to be able to hold hard-liners back from intervening. It is crucial that even before introducing liberalizing reforms, soft-liners have at least a few important supporters in the armed forces. This way those advocating for repression of the popular upsurge have to consider that some parts of the armed forces might not co-operate with them (Przeworski 1995:25). The danger of divided armed forces makes the argument of crushing the opposition considerably weaker.

Regardless of what the rhetoric soft-liners use or even the laws they pass, if

hard-liners dominate the armed forces, the opposition can be crushed and there is not much soft-liners can do to stop them. In the worst case scenario, hard-liners can stage a coup d'état and remove the soft-liners from power completely.

## **2.2. Second condition: politically organized opposition**

To convince regime members that negotiations are a better option than crackdown of the opposition, liberalization must develop far enough to allow autonomous political organization with leaders who have broad support among the population (Gill 2000:7). This may take the form of a political party or a labor union.

In order to make negotiations possible, important actors inside the regime must feel that the cost of repression exceed the cost of co-operation (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991:26-27). As groups and people can change their preferences over time, an opposition who is seen either as divided and weak or as too radical may tip the scales in favor of hard-line strategy. A diffused and unorganized opposition is not taken seriously as negotiating partners. It is also easier to sow disaccord within atomized opposition, which would then waste its energy on fighting with each other instead of forming a united block with common demands. In short, without a strong politically organized opposition, the costs of repression are not high enough to motivate regime members to even consider giving concessions.

When discussing the oppositional forces, Gill (2000:5) distinguishes “civil society” from “civil society forces”. He defines civil society as a society where there are autonomous groups to aggregate, promote and defend the views, activities and interests of individuals even against the state. This requires mutual recognition of legitimacy by the state and the civil society, as well the public discussion of issues (Ibid.).

In an authoritarian state, even if some autonomous organizations are tolerated, these groups are strictly apolitical. Thus, authoritarian states may have civil society forces, but no civil society. Gill (2000:6) even goes as far as to say: “Unless groups are able to defend their members' interests politically, they are not really able to defend them at all.”

Until political parties or labor unions appear, the opposition forces are too diffused, heterogeneous and disorganized to be able to negotiate with the regime. The

appearance of parties presumes there are leaders who enjoy the approval of enough people and groups that they can actually give guarantees in the negotiations with the soft-liners (Ibid.:61-62, 127).

Besides guarantees, an organized opposition will also provide an alternative to the authoritarian regime. This alternative unites and mobilizes people, as well as giving the soft-liners an idea of what to expect in the negotiations stage.

### **2.3. Third condition: moderates dominating the opposition**

To hold negotiations, moderates must dominate the opposition. Even when there is a politically organized opposition, soft-liners cannot negotiate with them if they see the radicals having the majority. Soft-liners need negotiation partners who can abide by the guarantees they give. This will not be the case if moderates cannot convince radicals to stop protesting and striking while they hold negotiations. Or as Przeworski (1995:69) words it: "Moderate gentlemen in cravats may lead civilized negotiations in government palaces, but if the streets are filled with crowds or factories are occupied by workers calling for the necks of their interlocutors, their moderation is irrelevant."

## **3. Iran from 1997 to 2005: the stages of an abortive liberalization**

The Islamic Republic of Iran was established in 1979, after a revolution that overthrew the authoritarian and pro-Western regime of the shah. The political system combines theocracy (manifested in the various institutions tasked with assuring all executive and legislative affairs are in accordance with the Islamic law), with the popularly elected institutions of the presidency and the parliament (Takeyh 2009:16, 24-27).

This chapter analyses the time period from 1997 to 2005, when Mohammad Khatami held the presidency, treating it as an example of an abortive liberalization. Using the theory of O'Donnell and Schmitter, the period under view is divided into three stages - liberalization, popular upsurge, and the political stand-off.

### **3.1. First stage: liberalization**

#### **3.1.1. Crises threatening the regime**

By the mid-nineties, the authoritarian-clerical regime of Iran was facing multiple crises threatening its stability, all of them primarily domestic in nature. Firstly, the second supreme leader, Sayyed Ali Khamenei lacked the charisma, the religious credentials and the authority that Grand Ayatollah Khomeini had gained from leading the revolution (Mahdavi 2011:96). The regime now had a considerably weaker leader.

Secondly, whereas the masses had played a major role in making the revolution happen (Keddie 2003:296), they now had grown alienated from the regime. For example, students contributed considerably to the revolution, from taking part in spreading the fundamental ideology of Khomeini to taking over the American embassy (Ashraf and Banuazizi 2001:239; Sadri 2001:274). However, by 1995 it was estimated that nearly half of Iran's population had been born after 1979, meaning that they had no personal experience with the revolution. Now, students were denouncing the strict Islamic dress codes, not advocating for the enforcement of the Islamic law (Banuazizi 1995:563, 571).

Thirdly, as the economic situation worsened, the regime grown out of the resentment of the poor was unprepared to handle the grievances of the expanding middle class (Keddie 2003:228; Gheissari and Nasr 2006:134). The devastating eight year Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988 had mobilized the masses against a direct outside threat, but now the regime had to address the various social and economic problems left behind by the war, many of which were hurting the middle class the most (Takeyh 2009:29).

All in all, the regime had a reason to worry – after all, economic crisis and alienated middle class are a common cause for many authoritarian regime collapses (Gill 2000:15, 18).

#### **3.1.2. Two strategies to address the crises**

There were considerable disagreements inside the regime on how to address these crises. Hard-liners' tactic was power consolidation and centralization, which they hoped to achieve by pushing the rivaling Islamic Left out of the government. This effort was lead by the supreme leader Khamenei himself, who appointed conservatives

advocating for the strict interpretation of the Islamic law to important positions in the military and the judiciary (Haas 2012:76). Many of the most important positions in the government are filled by the supreme leader's appointment (Kamrava and Hassan-Yari 2004:505) and as Khamenei wanted to strengthen his leadership position in the government, he filled these positions with like-minded and loyal conservatives. The logic of conservatives was that in times of crises, the regime should appear as centralized and united as possible.

The pragmatic members of the regime, whose ranks included president Rafsanjani, initially supported hard-liners in nudging the Islamic Left out of the government (Keddie 2003:266-267). However, pragmatists considered the tactics of hard-liners to be insufficient. The economic crisis and growing ranks of the middle class had already created a society where dissent was brewing, and some journals were beginning to publish highly critical articles on the corruption of politicians despite the penalties it brought (Takeyh 2009:121; Banuazizi 1995:563-564).

Because of this atmosphere of crisis, president Rafsanjani had made efforts to reform the economy, and to relax the rigid social and cultural laws that were alienating the young from the regime. However, his efforts were blocked by the hard-liners, who felt that these reforms endangered their position in the government and the stability of the regime (Wells 1999:33).

Meanwhile, the Islamic Left, who had been losing power thanks to the co-operative efforts of the hard-liners and the pragmatists, were re-emerging with new political stances and strategy. Since the collapse of Soviet Union had given a major blow to the credibility of the Left's arguments for greater state intervention in the economy, they reformed their ideology (Kamrava and Hassan-Yari 2004:514; Safshekan and Sabet 2010:547).

As the supreme leader was clearly favoring the Right, they decided to focus on the other source of legitimacy for their comeback – the people. Thus the Left laid economic questions aside and rebranded themselves as the Reformists. Their focus was channeled into cultural and social reforms (Safshekan and Sabet 2010:547; Keddie 2003:266-267). By stressing the need to open the regime's ideology to debate, the reformed Islamic Left aimed to re-gain power and re-connect the population with the regime at the same time.

### 3.1.3. Hard-liners and soft-liners

The political rivalry between the Left and the Right peaked during the 1997 presidential elections. Candidate Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri represented the **hard-liners**. According to him, the regime's sole purpose was to implement the word of God. As only learned clerics well-versed Islamic law can rule and the Supreme Leader's decisions should not be questioned, encouraging debate among the society was seen as unnecessary, potentially dangerous and destabilizing (Takeyh 2009:119). The political system established under Khomeini was to be maintained as it was.

Nuri's **soft-line** opponent was Muhammad Khatami, who had the backing of the reformed Islamic Left (Keddie 2003:269). His political platform argued for the establishment of democracy, civil society, rule of law, pluralism and dialogue among civilizations (Gheissari and Nasr 2006:134; Arjomand 2009:259). Previously, these concepts had either been considered anti-Islamic and foreign (Keddie 2003:280), or did not even have a Farsi equivalent<sup>1</sup>.

However, it is important to note that Khatami believed that these concepts should always be tied with Islam. Everyone has the right to question and debate is necessary, but only faith and religion can bring about real liberation, and attacks on the foundations of Islam are off limits (Vahdat 2005:657-658). While Khatami did say that rulers are accountable to God *and* the people, and that he wanted an Islamic democracy, he left unaddressed the questions of how the Supreme Leader should be elected and what the limits of his power should be (Vahdat 2005:658, 660, 664).

In the 1997 presidential elections, the soft-line candidate Khatami won with 70 percent of the vote (Gheissari and Nasr 2006:130). Although hard-liners controlled the most powerful positions and the state media, soft-liners' platform received support from the middle class, moderate clerics, students, and intellectuals (Gheissari and Nasr 2006:133; Gheissari and Nasr 2004:99).

In addition, Khatami's campaign received help from the pragmatists. After aiding the hard-liners in their efforts to push the Islamic Left out in the early 1990s, the pragmatists felt that the hard-liners were gaining too much influence. So by the 1997 elections, pragmatists were siding with the reformed Left. Besides giving Khatami's

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<sup>1</sup> Iranian words for “civil society” (*jame'eh-ye madani*), “legality” (*qanun-mandi*), and “citizen” (*shahrbandan*) are considered to neologisms popularized by Khatami (Arjomand 2009:259).



campaign financial support, the pragmatists also used their control of the executive branch to stop hard-liners from rigging the elections (Ashraf and Banuazizi 2001:250-251).

After the Reformists gained the presidency they started implementing liberalization policies. Since the legislative and judicial branch were still under hard-liners' control (Ibid.:251), these policies were largely informal. Using the powers of the executive branch, soft-liners made registration of NGOs and political parties easier, and relaxed restrictions on newspapers, journals, arts and cinema (Haas 2012:78; Gheissari and Nasr 2006:135-136; Keddie 2003:276). Their actions were supplemented with rhetoric signaling greater toleration for debate on political and social issues.

The two-fold aim of re-connecting the population with the regime and re-gaining power was to be achieved with popular pressure, insider negotiations, and decentralization. Soft-liners hoped that if the population mobilized behind them, hard-liners would be forced to allow liberalization policies to continue. Since soft-liners would have the backing of the population, hard-liners would have to negotiate with them, appoint soft-liners to important positions, and to decentralize power away from the conservative clerics and into the popularly elected institutions.

### **3.2. Second stage: popular upsurge**

Following this liberalization, those people who had once participated in the 1979 revolution and in the establishment of the Islamic Republic, but at some point had fallen out of favor or became disillusioned with the regime, started speaking out. Most influential of them was Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri, a cleric who was at one point a favorite to become the next supreme leader but who had later been denounced for his criticism of the system (Arjomand 2000:287). Montazeri spoke out against the regime, calling the institution of supreme leader to be strictly supervisory and divorced from direct administration. He had started making these arguments already in 1988 (Ibid.), but only when the media laws were relaxed could his ideas be discussed publicly. Although he was put under house arrest, he continued making statements and by setting an example, encouraged others to go further in their criticism of the regime (Keddie 2003:275).

Along with Montazeri, another important ideologue of the moderates was Abdolkarim Soroush, who argued for a more interpretive reading of Islamic law, and a reformation of Islam (Gheissari and Nasr 2004:97). Montazeri and Soroush became very popular, and demands for making the office of supreme leader directly elected with a limited term gained popularity (Arjomand 2000:288).

After first brave dissenters spoke out, popular upsurge followed. There was great growth in the numbers of active associations, journals and newspapers in circulation, and new movies made (Keddie 2003:276; Gheissari and Nasr 2006:135-136). Liberalization policies had the most pronounced effect on the media. Journals started covering the corruption, repression and governmental mismanagement of the regime, as well as discussing the potential alternatives to the current system (Gheissari and Vali 2006:135-136; Tarock 2001:591-592).

Many authors discussing the period of liberalization under president Khatami bring out only three political forces – regime hard-liners (variously called the Islamic Right, conservatives, principalists etc.), pragmatists and the Reformers.<sup>2</sup> This may have been the case during the 1997 presidential elections, when the middle class, the non-governmental organizations, moderate clerics, secularists, intellectuals all supported and voted for Khatami (Gheissari and Nasr 2006:133; Mahdavi 2011:98). However, as the actual liberalization took off and media regulations were relaxed, a lively debate broke out over what the relationship between Islam and the government, God and the people should be. While many of the people writing for the journals used the same language as Khatami (Kamrava 2001:170, 173-174), they went considerably further in the reforms they considered necessary to have a civil society, rule of law, and Islamic democracy.

The discussion of alternatives to the current system produced a considerable pluralism of ideas. However, a distinction between regime soft-liners, and opposition moderates and radicals is still possible. All **moderates**, including Montazeri and Soroush, were similar in their demand for an Islamic democracy with reformed institutions<sup>3</sup>. Their demands went considerably further from what the soft-liners wanted.

Khatami's pluralism and civil society required the consent of the rulers who could always stop unwanted discussions by calling them a threat to the foundations of

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example Gheissari and Nasr 2006:136, Keddie 2003:282, Haas 2012:70-73.

<sup>3</sup> Their views are described in more detail by Gheissari and Nasr 2004:97; Arjomand 2000:287-288 and Arjomand 2009:260.

Islam and thus off-limits to the people. Moderates, in contrast, were arguing for a popularly elected supreme leader with fixed terms limits (Arjomand 2009:260; Tarock 2001:591-592). Had moderates achieved what they advocated for, the regime would have altered, because its main pillar, the supreme leader would have undergone a drastic change in functions and power. By arguing for reformation of Islam, they accepted that the state would have to give up the right to define what is meant by “foundations of Islam”, and open these to debate as well<sup>4</sup>.

Soon, students and secular intellectuals went even further in their demands, and started to speak out for a secular democracy (Gheissari and Nasr 2004:99, 103). They were the **radicals** of the liberalization, who wanted to completely dismantle the regime and abandon the revolutionary goal of Islamic government. So far, liberalization had mostly consisted of the lively public debate expressed via the numerous newspapers and journals that were now allowed to be published. Radicals, however, knew that their views would not be tolerated even under the relaxed media policies. Thus, they used protests to express their dissent (Gheissari and Nasr 2004:103; Arjomand 2000:291).

### 3.2.1. The four political actors

In brief, four political actors developed in the course of the liberalization: hard-liners opposing any changes to the regime, soft-liners wanting a greater freedom of speech and pluralism of views, moderates hoping to reform the institutions into an effective Islamic democracy, and radicals demanding a secular democracy. The representatives of each strategic posture and their views are listed in table 2.

Had the soft-liners enough control over the regime to negotiate, a compromise between the regime and the moderate opposition would have been plausible. Soft-liners and moderates were using largely the same vocabulary of civil society, rule of law, and democracy (Arjomand 2009:258; Kamrava 2001). Though they differed on extent of how much the regime should be reformed, they agreed on maintaining the Islamic disposition of the country. Khatami and other soft-liners had a reason to believe that if the system was to be reformed, moderates would allow soft-liners to compete for power

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<sup>4</sup> It may be argued that Khatami also wanted an Islamic democracy, but had to limit his criticism of the regime to be able to run in the elections. However, as it impossible to know his true intentions, this papers positions Khatami and Reformers by their public statements and writings. Khatami used the word “democracy“, but he did not speak of the institutional and constitutional reforms needed to give people sovereignty. By definition, Iran could not become democratic as long as the supreme leader, who was not popularly elected, kept his authority and control over the armed forces.

in the new framework.

<p><b>Soft-liners</b></p> <p><i>President Khatami, the executive branch, former revolutionaries disillusioned with the regime, parliament from 2000 to 2004.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Islamic democracy with the rule of law, greater participation, decentralization, civil society</li> <li>- Rulers are accountable to God and the people</li> <li>- No reformation of the institution of the supreme leader is needed, however the current constitution needs to be fully enforced</li> <li>- Non-clerics should not question the foundations of Islam</li> </ul>	<p><b>Hard-liners</b></p> <p><i>Supreme leader Khamenei, and conservative clerics who dominated the judiciary, the armed forces, the Guardian Council, the state media, and until 1999, the parliament. Supporters in the economically powerful bazaar.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Government's task is to enforce Islamic law.</li> <li>- Only learned clerics can rule.</li> <li>- Democracy is a Western import unsuitable to the Iranian society</li> <li>- Reformists are abandoning the revolutionary goals</li> </ul>
<p><b>Moderates</b></p> <p><i>Moderate clerics such as Montazeri and Soroush, Islamic liberals and the middle class.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Popularly elected supreme leader</li> <li>- Reformation of Islam</li> <li>- Islamic democracy with sovereignty to the people<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>	<p><b>Radicals</b></p> <p><i>Students, secular intellectuals.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secular democracy with guarantees on individual, political and social rights</li> <li>- The supreme leader needs to step down</li> </ul>

*Table 2: The main stances of the four political actors; based on Arjomand 2009:258; Sadri 2001:274; Takeyh 2009:123, 184; Haas 2012:70-72; Gheissari and Nasr 2006:131-132, 138-139; Gheissari and Nasr 2004:103; Arjomand 2000:291.*

<sup>5</sup> While there are many academics who consider Islamic government to be incompatible with democracy, this paper assumes that Islamic democracy is not an oxymoron.

In reality, soft-liners did not feel strong enough to start any negotiations. Hard-liners had started blocking soft-liners as soon as Khatami was elected. They used the judiciary, the parliament and the armed forces to send soft-liners the signal that as soon as liberalization escaped regime's control, they would intervene (Haas 2012:84-85; Tarock 2001:597).

This made soft-liners very cautious. In his rhetoric, president Khatami made it clear that he supported the current institutional system and the authority of the supreme leader. While he continued speaking about rule of law, civil society and the like, he did not dare speak of any constitutional changes (Gheissari and Nasr 2006:140). All those groups who had supported Khatami during the 1997 election were becoming more and more disillusioned with how much the system could be changed without radical institutional reforms, and whether it could be reformed from the inside at all (Gheissari and Nasr 2006:140; Takeyh 2009:185-190). Soft-liners and moderates were drifting further apart.

The feeling of alienation was reinforced in the stand-off stage when the hard-liners used violence, arrests and assassinations of those who opposed the regime. During the 1999 student protests, soft-liners were unable to hold hard-liners back, and could only caution the protestors to calm down and stop protesting (Gheissari and Nasr 2006:140). One of the main reasons why these protestors had come to the streets was that they had already seen that soft-liners could not bring about any tangible change. After 1999, many in the opposition felt that the soft-liners were not only helpless, but even taking the hard-liners' side.

### **3.3. The stand-off**

Though in a gradual way, hard-liners' reaction to liberalization policies had began as soon as soft-liners assumed office. Their stand-off hit its peak in 1999, but in many ways the tension lasted throughout Khatami's both presidential terms, from 1997 to 2005, and concerned various questions of authority, such as who could disqualify candidates for elections, how much should the Guardian Council and supreme leader interfere in the parliament's work, whose orders should the judiciary follow and so on (Keddie 2003:276; Arjomand 2009:256,266).

The question of press freedom provides a good illustration to the tensions between hard-liners, soft-liners and the opposition. In the course of liberalization, media became the central arena for the popular upsurge, as soft-liners had limited power, and the most important channel they could use to strengthen their position was the Ministry of Culture. Since they did not control the legislative branch, having the media favor their policies was the central point of the soft-liners' „pressure from below, negotiations from above” approach. By relaxing control and censorship of the media, they hoped to get the people to mobilize in support their policies, which would in turn put the pressure on the hard-liners (Tarock 2001:589-590). Intellectuals and clerics, regime insiders and outsiders, used the media to communicate with the population, and through newspapers and journals, a lively debate about the future of the regime blossomed (Tarock 2001:591-592; Keddie 2003:270-271).

For the first two years, hard-liners used sporadic intimidation tactics on the opposition. While Khatami was giving speeches about establishing the rule of law and allowing debate on religion, dissident writer-activists were attacked, arrested or even murdered. A special Court for the Clergy was set, which directly threatened media freedom because many of the editors of the oppositional newspapers were clerics (Keddie 2003:275; Gheissari and Nasr 2006:138).

From time to time, reform-minded newspapers were closed down by the hard-liners, mostly on the grounds of blasphemy or denunciation of the ideas of the revolution. Initially, as the banned publishers could still apply for a press license, many of the closed newspapers continued being published under a new name but with the same writing staff (Tarock 2001:595). However, in 1999 the hard-liners intensified their attack on the oppositional media by closing down nineteen opposition newspapers at the same time. Among those newspapers was one of the most influential reformist newspapers in the country, *Salam*.

In response, students staged demonstrations to this move (Tarock 2001:591). In these protests, demands for the supreme leader to step down were growing louder than ever before (Arjomand 2000:291; Ashraf and Banuazizi 2001:252). Soft-liners could not hold the hard-liners back and the protests were violently suppressed, which had the unintended effect of mobilizing students all over the country. The government issued a ban on demonstrations, but it took the police and the vigilante groups five days to break

up the crowds. More than thousand people were arrested and at least dozen people died, while president Khatami could not do anything other than issue statements calling protestors to stop (Tarock 2001:591; Keddie 2003:296-277).

Next year, hard-liners intensified their campaign against the opposition as well as the soft-liners. The minister of culture, Ataollah Mohajerani, faced impeachment and was forced to resign from office (Gheissari and Nasr 2006:139-140). Soft-liners had no control over the armed forces or the judiciary, so instead of stopping this crackdown, they themselves had to act very cautiously, lest the hard-liners force all of the soft-liners out of the government.

Meanwhile, the 2000 parliamentary elections had given soft-liners majority. Using their control of the legislative branch, soft-liners tried to ease the press laws, in order to take away the hard-liners' legal grounds to shut down Reformist and opposition newspapers and journals. Yet their bills were blocked by the supreme leader and the Guardian Council. The parliament tried to use the roundabout ways by passing binding reinterpretations of existing press laws. These efforts were also blocked by hard-liners (Arjomand 2009:266).

By the 2001 presidential election it was clear that the soft-liners were unable to reform the system from inside. President Khatami won the second term, but the impetus for change had died down (Takeyh 2009:195). There were some student demonstrations and strikes by teachers and bus drivers, but all in all the popular mobilization had fizzled out (Maljoo 2006:31-32; Gheissari and Nasr 2006:139). Only in the 2004 parliamentary elections and 2005 presidential elections did the conservatives re-gain control over the executive and legislative branch (Gheissari and Nasr 2006:142-143), although real hope for a transition or at least a tangible reform had subsided long before.

Thus, there was no clear moment when the hard-liners took over. Instead, ever since Khatami and other soft-liners assumed office, tactics of intimidation and obstruction were used to discourage soft-liners and the opposition. In hindsight, this tactic of wearing their opponents down was probably even more effective than a clear *coup d'état* would have been, as a clear and sudden take over may have mobilized bigger parts of the population against conservative clerical rule. By selective repression, hard-liners could sow confusion, uncertainty and false hopes among those wanting to reform the system.

As O'Donnell and Schmitter note (1991:56), popular mobilization is ephemeral by nature and will die down eventually. In Iran, the opposition did not manage to form a clear movement for change, and the prolonged stand-off between the hard-liners and their opponents slowly wore the enthusiasm of moderates and radicals down.

### **3.4. The consequences of Khatami's unsuccessful liberalization**

Even though president Khatami's was unsuccessful in reforming the system, the liberalization and its aftermath forced all political actors – soft-liners, moderates, radicals and even hard-liners, to rethink their ideology and strategic postures.

By the 2005 presidential elections, many moderates had long given up the hope for reforming the government from inside and were now calling for boycott of the elections. Soft-liners could not come up with a clear strategy and a candidate, and several candidates ran under the “Reformist” label, which split the votes of their supporters (Gheissari and Sanandaji 2009:278).

Hard-liners, however, went through a change as well. The long deadlock with soft-liners and their supporters in the opposition had convinced many hard-liners to pay more attention to the sentiments of the population. In the 1997 elections they had ran with the same slogans Khomeiney used in the 1979 revolution, essentially claiming that only Islamic clerics are fit to rule (Takeyh 2009:119). However, the pressure put on the clerics during the popular upsurge had shown that even the Islamic government could be overthrown if the economic situation is dire and the population unhappy.

Thus, in 2005 most of the conservative presidential candidates were calling for economic reform (Gheissari and Sanandaji 2009:278). This strategy attacked soft-liners' weakest spot, since Khatami's ideology had paid very little attention to the economic problems, focusing instead on the cultural and social issues (Gheissari and Nasr 2006:137).

Hard-liners in the armed forces recognized that the regime needed to address the “earthly” matters of bread and butter to stay in power. The 2005 presidential elections were won by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who came from a military background, and the parliamentary elections held the year before also showed that the number of politicians with military ties was growing (Gheissari and Nasr 2006:138; Takeyh 2009:234-235).



Thus, the military has been getting considerably more involved in politics, while over time, conflicts between them and the clerical members of the regime have grown (Takeyh 2009:236).

For the opposition, Khatami's liberalization policies enabled intellectuals and non-governmental organizations to regroup after the “cultural revolution” of 1980s, when the conservatives purged universities and other academic and cultural organizations, and thousands of academics and members of the intelligentsia were arrested, imprisoned or forced into exile (Ashraf and Banuazizi 2001:242). The brief period of relaxed media censorship allowed the intellectuals and activists to exchange ideas and find sympathetic voices among their audience.

More importantly, soft-liners realized they had more in common with the opposition than with the hard-liners. In 2009, when Ahmadinejad won his second presidential term amid accusations of wide-spread electoral fraud, Khatami and many members of his government were already part of the opposition<sup>6</sup>. The demonstrations were brutally repressed, but this time a dominant oppositional movement, the so called Green Movement, was formed. In comparison to the popular upsurge of the period when Khatami held presidency, the opposition had a comparatively clearer set of leaders<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, the opposition is slowly getting better at organizing and uniting like-minded people, while the current political system keeps fostering new factional rivalries among regime insiders.

#### **4. The necessary conditions for a transition and the case of Iran**

This chapter explains why president Khatami's liberalization policies did not move on to a transition, ending instead with a stand-off between hard-liners, soft-liners and the oppositional forces. For this end, the three necessary conditions from the second chapter are applied on the empirical case of Iran.

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<sup>6</sup> Even more, he has become one of the leading figures of the Green Movement (Sahimi 2011).

<sup>7</sup> See: Worth, Robert F. „Moussavi Forms 'Grass-Roots' Movement in Iran,” *New York Times*, August 15, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/16/world/middleeast/16iran.html> MacFarquhar, Neil „Mystery Deepens on Status of Iran Oppositional Leaders,” *New York Times*, February 28, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/01/world/middleeast/01iran.html> Yong, William „Iranian Leaders Vow to Crush March,” *New York Times*, February 13, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/14/world/middleeast/14iran.html>

#### **4.1. First condition: soft-line leaders in the military**

*Condition: Even before introducing liberalizing reforms, soft-liners have at least a few important supporters in the armed forces.*

During the presidency of Khatami from 1997 to 2005, hard-liners controlled all of the armed forces in Iran. Unlike most political systems, where the executive branch controls the military and the police, in Iran the supreme leader is the commander in chief of the armed forces (Kamrava and Hassan-Yari 2004:505). The supreme leader and his advisors also maintained control of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (Jahanbegloo 2011:130). Furthermore, because the head of the judiciary is also appointed by the supreme leader (Kamrava and Hassan-Yari 2004:505), hard-liners could count on the loyalty of the courts and prosecutors.

The most influential part of the armed forces was the Revolutionary Guards. This institution was created after the 1979 revolution with the task to protect social order and the clerical government, and has its own naval and air forces (Abootalebi 2000:49). During Khatami's presidency, Guards maintained their full loyalty to the supreme leader. In 1999, during the student protests, 24 commanding officers of the Revolutionary Guards wrote a threatening letter to president Khatami stating that they were ready to intervene any time the supreme leader Khamenei would tell them to (Abootalebi 2000:49).

Admittedly soft-liners were able to put some pressure on the intelligence services with media's support. In the late 1990s, the relaxed media regulations enabled newspapers to report on the political killings and torture of the opposition leaders. For example, after the 1999 student demonstrations, where the policemen attacked and arrested thousands of protestors, after harsh criticism hard-liners allowed over a hundred policemen to be put on trial for the attacks, and supreme leader Khamenei replaced the head of the judiciary with a more pragmatic conservative (Keddie 2003:277). However, this was just a small concession. All in all, in terms of force, hard-liners had the upper hand over the soft-liners, and Khatami and his allies had to operate with the knowledge that if they were seen to overstep certain boundaries, a hard-line *coup d'état* was very possible.

#### **4.2. Second condition: politically organized opposition**

*Condition: liberalization must develop far enough to allow autonomous political organization with oppositional leaders who have broad support among the population.*

This condition also remained unfilled. In fact, even political forces inside the regime were weakly organized. Iran has no dominant governmental party and the party system is very fragmented<sup>8</sup>. During Khatami's presidency, there were three clear factions in the parliament, each composed of many party-like organizations - the Association of the Hizb Allah, representing the soft-liners; the Hizb Allah Members of Parliament, representing the hard-liners; and the Independent Hizb Allah Members who could support either one (Abootalebi 2000:48-49), but these factions did not become the leading actors during liberalization. Rather, they played the supporting role, helping the supreme leader and his advisors to curb Khatami's policies or from the other side, trying to pass more liberal press laws to support the Reformist government.

While the soft-line interior minister did relax the rules for registering political parties (Keddie 2003:276), no strong opposition parties developed in the course of liberalization. Media remained as the main channel for debate, and while this allowed many different intellectuals, journalists, clerics, NGO activists and so on to express their views, this did not bring about a coherent movement.

Labor unions did not play a visible role in the popular upsurge stage either. Only in 2001, when the popular upsurge was already subsiding due to hard-liners' repression and general mobilization fatigue, did teachers start organizing wide-spread strikes to demand better pay. Bus workers held strikes in 2004, but just like the teachers, they were also unsuccessful in their efforts (Maljoo 2006:31-32).

This lack of political organization was a result of a combination of two factors. First, since the regime had held elections from the beginning, there was no "founding elections" moment. The elections' system was criticized for the large number of candidates who were disqualified in each election (Keddie 2003:275; Arjomand

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<sup>8</sup> There are several political parties in Iran, but they are underdeveloped. None of the authors cited in this paper consider them to be important players in Iran's politics – the source of legitimacy (supreme leader or the people) predicts the behavior of political actors considerably better. For an overview of Iran's party system, see Asayesh, Hossein; Halim, Adlina Ab.; Javan, Jayum A.; Shojaei, Seyedeh Nosrat (2011) „Political Party in Islamic Republic of Iran: A Review“ *Journal of Politics and Law* 4 (1), 221-230.

2009:265), but this was not the main point of criticism for the opposition. Instead, the demands of the opposition were centered on the institution of the supreme leader and how he should be elected. Iran's political system placed most of the power in the hands of two individuals – the supreme leader and the president. The debate centered on whether the clerically elected supreme leader or the popularly elected president should be the center of power. Compared to this, the authority of the parliament was a secondary issue. Had the parliamentary elections been the focus of the debate, then the opposition would probably have been more active in forming strong political parties.

Secondly, at least until the 1999 student protests, the opposition still tended to side with soft-liners. There is a reason why most authors do not make a distinction between the soft-liners inside the government and the opposition and place them all under the general label of Reformers. While the opposition went further in their demands for change, because hard-liners held all the levers of repression, they considered publicly supporting Khatami's presidency to be their best hope. Essentially, the opposition placed its bets on Khatami and did not form its own political organizations.

The wide-scale demonstrations against the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad after the 2009 presidential elections offer a contrast. Then the opposition did not have powerful soft-line regime insiders they could count on, and formed the Green Movement. During Khatami's presidency, the hope that the regime could be reformed from the inside may have held the opposition back from politically organizing, because that could bring about unnecessary division in a time where those wanting to reform the system should be as united as possible.

#### **4.3. Third condition: moderates dominating the opposition**

*Condition: moderates must be able to dominate the opposition.*

During the period under study, moderates were able to dominate the opposition. As stated previously, media was the center of the liberalization and popular upsurge. There, debate centered around the powers and source of legitimacy of the supreme leader (Arjomand 2009:260; Tarock 2001:591-592; Takeyh 2009:183) and not on whether the government and the religion should be separated. Thus, media was

dominated by the moderates.

The radicals advocating for a secular democracy used demonstrations and protests to voice their statements, but even there they were joined by the moderates. Some authors state that the 1999 protests were about demanding for the supreme leader and other clerics to step down (Ashraf and Banuazizi 2001:252; Arjomand 2000:291), while others say that the main demand was still that the supreme leader would stop directly interfering in politics (Tarock 2001:591). This shows that even the very claim that radicals dominated the protests is arguable. Furthermore, as the student protests were violently repressed and many participants were arrested (Keddie 2003:276-277), and as this remained as the largest protest during Khatami's presidency, these protests made radicals weaker, not stronger.

All in all, only one of the three conditions, meaning the moderates dominating the opposition, was present during Khatami's presidency. The other two conditions – soft-line leaders in the military and a politically organized opposition, were missing. Although many different explanations for the failure of the liberalization and the Reform movement can be brought out, the conditions derived from O'Donnell and Schmitter's theory provide very plausible causes for why the soft-liners and moderates could not co-operate and why the hard-liners ended up dominating the government.

Had the opposition formed strong oppositional parties during the popular upsurge, the costs of repression could have gone high enough to push the old regime from power even with the armed forces under hard-line control. However, the combination of hard-line control over the military and lack of political organization in the opposition made moving repressing dissent easier than negotiating with the moderates. In fact, the fact that radicals were not dominant in the opposition only lowered the costs of repression for hard-liners.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis used transition theory on the empirical case of Iran under president Khatami, from 1997 to 2005, to analyze the dynamics of his reform efforts and the structural causes behind his lack of success.

O'Donnell and Schmitter's theory claims that there is a causal relation between liberalization policies undertaken by authoritarian rulers, and popular mobilization that can force these rulers to step down and allow democratic elections to take place. This process does not develop without plenty of conflicts and tensions. Instead, it is a result of the interaction of four political actors – hard-liners and soft-liners inside the regime, and moderates and radicals in the opposition.

Unless the opposition is able to force the authoritarian regime from power, this process tends to be a result of negotiations. When no actor is strong enough to dominate over others, they may agree to make a compromise and allow a new political system to be established, hopefully one which is competitive and open

At least three conditions must be filled so that authoritarian rulers and oppositional forces could and would want to negotiate. First, soft-liners must have at least some control over the armed forces. Secondly, the opposition must be politically organized and have a strong leadership. Thirdly, moderate forces must dominate over the more radical actors of the opposition.

Under president Khatami, Iran went through an abortive liberalization which did not move on to the negotiations stage. Instead, liberalization and popular mobilization were followed by a long period of stand-off, with hard-liners on the one side and soft-liners, moderates and radicals on the other side. Although there was an overlap between the aims of soft-liners and moderates, their efforts to co-operate against regime hard-liners were in vain.

This was mainly because two of the necessary three conditions for negotiations were absent. First, hard-liners had almost complete control over the armed forces, as well as the intelligence services, the judiciary and the police. Secondly, opposition did not organize into political parties or strong labor unions. The combination of these two factors meant that the costs of repressing oppositional voices were relatively low. Therefore, the only satisfied condition – moderates dominating the opposition over radicals – was insufficient to motivate political actors to negotiate with each other. Furthermore, it possibly lowered the costs of repression even further.

These three conditions could be described as the institutional and organizational causes for Khatami's failure. Although he stayed in office until 2005, most of his supporters had lost hope in the possibility of reforming the system from inside already

by 1999 or 2000. However, his presidency had allowed oppositional forces to regroup themselves, while forcing the hard-liners to rethink their strategy for staying in power.

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## **Kokkuvõte:** Liberaliseerimine kui režiimisiirde päästik: president Khatami edutu reformikatsed Iraanis

Käesolev bakalaureusetöö analüüsib Iraani presidendi Mohammad Khatami reformikatsed ja sellega raames ette võetud liberaliseerimisprogrammi Guillermo O'Donnell'i ja Philippe C. Schmitteri režiimisiirete teooria alusel. Töö eesmärgiks oli eristada liberaliseerimise käigus kujunenud poliitilised tegutsejad nende tegutsemisstrateegiate alusel, välja selgitada nende tegutsejate koostööeelistused ning uurida, kas režiimisiirdeks vajalikud tingimused olid vaatlusalusel perioodil Iraanis täidetud.

Töö teoreetiline raamistik põhineb O'Donnell'i ja Schmitteri teoorial. Nende kahe akadeemiku väitel panevad autoritaarsete valitsejate algatatud liberaliseerimiskatsed tihti aluse opositsiooni mobiliseerumisele, mis võib kujuneda niivõrd ulatuslikuks, et sunnib autoritaarsed valitsejad ametist lahkuma ja lubab välja kuulutada demokraatlikud valimised. Nende jaoks on siire nelja poliitilise tegutseja – võimalolevate kõvakäeliste ja pehmekäeliste ning opositsiooni kuuluvate mõõdukate ja radikaalsete jõudude omavahelise konkurentsi tagajärg.

Pehmekäelised ehk reformimeelsed usuvad, et kriisi oludes peab valitsus lubama kodanikel „auru välja lasta“ ja pooldab seega poliitikaid, mis lõdvendavad autoritaarse riigi haaret oma elanikkonna üle, lubades neile näiteks suuremat sõnavabadust või autonoomsete ühingute loomise õigust. Kõvakäelised ehk konservatiivid on sellele vastu, väites et rahulolematust tuleb maha suruda kasvõi vägi valla abiga, aga liberaliseerumine destabiliseeriks süsteemi. Mõõdukad kuuluvad opositsiooni, kuid püüavad vältida kõvakäeliste välja vihistamist ning on valmis tegema pehmekäelistega kompromisse, juhul kui see veenab autoritaarseid valitsejaid võimult lahkuma. Radikaalid kuuluvad samuti opositsiooni, kuid nemad ei ole nõus režiimiga läbi rääkima ning eelistavad oma nõudmisi esitada protestide ja demonstratsioonide kaudu.

Kui ükski neljast poliitilisest tegutsejast ei ole piisavalt tugev, et teiste üle domineerida ning neid maha suruda, siis võivad pehmekäelised ja mõõdukad otsustada asuda omavahel läbirääkimisi pidama. Läbirääkimiste käigus antakse autoritaarsetele valitsejatele piisavalt palju garantiisid ja järeleandmisi, et nad oleksid nõus võimult lahkuma. Jõudude ummikseisu võib niisiis olla võimaldada üles ehitada uus,

loodetavasti demokraatlik, poliitiline režiim.

Iraan on ebademokraatlik riik, kus kõrgeim võim riigis kuulub kõrgeimale usujuhile (*the supreme leader*), kes on ametis oma elu lõpuni ning kes ei ole valitud rahva poolt.

Siiski on Iraanil ka rahva poolt valitav president ning just president Khatami valitsemisajal aastatel 1997 kuni 2005 tegi Iraan läbi liberaliseerimise, mille eesmärgiks oli riigi poliitilist süsteemi reformida. Opositsioonil lubati vabamalt arvamust avaldada, eriti läbi vähem tsenseeritud ajakirjanduse. Juba kostis lootusrikkaid hääli, mis ennustasid Iraani demokratiseerumist. Khatami reformikatses osutus aga edutuks ning liberaliseerimisega kaasnenud vabadused ja tagatised, näiteks suurem meediavabadus ning lihtsustatud kord mittetulundusühingute registreerimiseks, võeti tagasi. See juhtus sellest hoolimata, et Khatami ja teiste pehmekäeliste ja opositsiooni kuuluvate mõõdukate seisukohtade vahel oli rohkelt sarnasusi, mis oleks võimaldanud neil teha koostööd.

Liberaliseerumine kukkus läbi ja ei toonud kaasa režiimisiirde sellepärast, et kaks kolmest läbirääkimiste toimumiseks vajalikust tingimusest ei olnud Khatami ajal Iraanis täidetud. Esiteks omasid kontrolli sõjaväe ja teiste vägivallaorganite üle konservatiivsed kõvakäelised, mitte opositsiooniga koostöö tegemise osas paindlikumad pehmekäelised jõud. Teiseks ei olnud opositsioonis välja kujunenud tugevaid poliitilisi organisatsioone, vaid nii mõõdukad kui radikaalsed jõud jäid killustatuteks. Seetõttu oli kõvakäelistel lihtne opositsiooni vägivalla abil maha suruda, mis tugevamalt organiseerunud ja mobiliseerinud vastase korral niivõrd lihtne ei oleks olnud.

Kolmas režiimisiirdeks vajalik tingimus oli Iraanis täidetud – mõõdukad domineerisid radikaalide üle. Kui läbirääkimised pehmekäeliste ja mõõdukate vahel oleksid olnud võimalikud, siis oleks see tingimus andnud autoritaarsetele valitsejatele kindluse, et need, kellega nad läbi rääkima asuvad suudavad tegelikkuses ka antud lubadusi täita. Kuna eelmised kaks režiimisiirde tingimust ei olnud aga täidetud, siis tegi asjaolu, et opositsiooni peamiseks nõudmiste esitamise kanaliks oli ajakirjandus, mitte tänavatel protestimine, opositsiooni maha surumise ainult lihtsamaks.

Nii oli juba 2000. aastaks selge, et Khatami ei suuda süsteemi seestpoolt reformida. Küll oli tema presidendiks oleku aeg andnud opositsioonile võimaluse välja kujundada ühised seisukohad ning leida mõttekaaslasi. Aastal 2009, mil Iraanis

lahvatasid presidendivalimiste järel ulatuslikud protestid, oli opositsioon juba oluliselt paremini organiseerunud. Kuigi seekord jäi neil puudu režiimisestest toetusest ning nende meeleavaldused suruti vägivaldselt maha, näitas Roheliseks Liikumiseks organiseerunud protestiliikumine, et Khatami aegne liberaliseerimine oli opositsiooni koosseisule ja nõudmistele avaldanud tugevat mõju.